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Lincoln and Douglas

ADDRESS

OF

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It is a privilege to participate in ceremonies of this nature in this room redolent of the memory of one of the most memorable utterances of one of the world's immortals. A small room, in a comparatively small building, in what was then a small town—and yet from this little room went forth a phrase which made a profound impression on the minds of men and soon took on the dignity of prophecy. "A house divided against itself can not stand"—a simple phrase, controversial at the time, and yet expressive of a tragic truth.

When Abraham Lincoln thus spoke that day no one could possibly have foreseen that after 70 years this room would seem a shrine because he then spoke within its walls, or that the speaker's name would be revered in every land and clime. For no pompous pose, no pride of opinion, no gasconading glitter and dash set him on a pedestal apart from his friends and neighbors, and he stood among them a simple, unpretentious man with his feet upon the ground. He had literally fought his way from poverty and obscurity and he bore scars upon his soul. He had known disillusionment and sorrow and many rebuffs of fortune, and he was no longer young.

Even in the year of the memorable debates he was not appreciated or understood by those most intimately identified with his campaign. The politicians thought he blundered when he challenged one of the most brilliant figures that ever fascinated a people in the arena of debate. The strategists were alarmed because of the audacity of his utterances. And yet within six years this man who really plowed a lonely furrow all his life had enriched the literature of the language with an immortal oration, had wisely and patiently supervised the preservation of the Union, and had struck the shackles from 10,000,000 slaves.

It is a remarkable fact that the ability, the genius, the breadth and depth and power of Lincoln was less appreciated by his political associates 70 years ago than by his lifelong rival, Stephen A. Douglas. He appreciated Lincoln more than Seward, more than Chase, infinitely more than Sumner. On the eve of the struggle of 1858 he knew he was girding his loins for a supreme effort when many of the followers of Lincoln were reconciling themselves to the political burial of their leader.

THE RIVALRY

No two great leaders of opposing forces in all history have been more strangely identified in their careers. When we think of the younger Pitt we think of Charles James Fox, with whom he waged his memorable parliamentary battles of the golden age of the House of Commons. Mention Gladstone and we think of Disraeli. Name Jefferson and the figure of Hamilton moves into the picture evoked. And so with Lincoln and Douglas. They were cast for opposing parts in more than one drama of their day; their lives had touched at many points; and so long as Lincoln is remembered Douglas can not be forgotten.

There has been a foolish tendency to assume that there is something of disrespect to Lincoln in doing justice to the rival who finally, in a crisis, became his most powerful ally. It has been reserved for Mr. Beveridge to do Douglas justice in his monumental biography of Lincoln, and to show that one need not depress the historic stature of the one to maintain that of the other.

Stephen A. Douglas is one of the most majestic figures in all our history. He had a genius for statesmanship. He had constructive capacity of a very high order. He was a master in the management of men and of conflicting forces. In the Senate of Webster, Calhoun, and Clay he met the greatest on equal terms and without a dipping of his colors. There he was the Bayard of debate. He caught the popular fancy as few men have, and his followers were legion in every quarter of the land. He envisioned as only Benton did the westward march of an adventurous people to the redeeming of the wilderness to the purposes

of man. It was his statesmanship that molded many States from Territories and ushered them into the council chamber of the Nation. It was his presence that planned the binding of the East and West with bands of steel, and he led the way. His devotion was to the Constitution, his passion for the Union. He fought throughout his life for one, and for the other he died, at length, as literally as Lincoln.

Lincoln no more underestimated Douglas than Douglas Lincoln.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATES

The world is familiar with the contacts of these extraordinary men from 1858 until they were broken by the death of Douglas. That which gives something of romance and drama to their relations lies in the half-hidden years before. Here were two men whose birthplaces were separated by mountains and streams and wildernesses of primeval woods, whom fate predestined should complement each other.

By all the dictates of convention all the advantage in the contests of these two men should have been with Douglas. When he first saw the light in a neat cottage in the thoroughly settled town of Brandon, in Vermont, the child Lincoln, in his fourth year, was toddling about a sordid cabin in a Kentucky clearing.

The father of one was an educated and successful physician; that of the other the most tragic of all failures—an unsuccessful and illiterate ne'er-do-well. Douglas had the background of success; Lincoln of failure.

When Douglas was regularly attending school and living in an atmosphere of study the other, deprived of schooling, was trudging weary miles to borrow books, hiring out to the neighboring farms, and finding his companionship in an illiterate population. The environment of Douglas was an incentive to ambition; that of Lincoln was a discouragement.

The year that Douglas was admitted to the bar Lincoln was elected to the legislature, where he was soon joined by Douglas, and these two youths instantly took rank as debaters and managers of men. At this time Lincoln was more the conventional politician; Douglas more the statesman. It was Douglas, not Lincoln, who proposed the constructive measures. The first clash of the two rivals came when Lincoln voted against the election of Douglas as State's attorney.

One year later their contact tightens in their common life in Springfield. Both were deeply engrossed in politics, and neither underestimated then, or ever, the power of the press. Turn the pages of the Springfield Republican of 1837 and you will find the imprint of Douglas's mind; read the comments of the Springfield Journal and you will find the reflection of Lincoln's thought. These men were debating then under cover.

Another year and Douglas, 25 and a nominee for Congress, is elected and counted out and Lincoln's partner counted in, and it was Lincoln who feverishly prepared the defense against an anticipated contest.

Two years more, in 1840, we find them stumping the State in opposition. Often their paths crossed; frequently they drove together; occasionally they divided time; and the renown of both was spread among their partisans.

And then Douglas forged ahead, with his election, at 30, to the House of Representatives. The next three years were the least attractive in the career of Lincoln; the most fruitful in that of Douglas. In the great arena of the Nation the Little Giant was amazing many by his brilliancy as statesman and debater. His stirring defense of Andrew Jackson immediately fixed his status as a partisan; his arguments on constitutional construction established his standing as a thinker, and he was compelling attention by the nationalism of his views that knew no section. There was something of Websterian majesty in this bright youth of Illinois that captivated Congress and captured the imaginations of the people far beyond.

Thus while Lincoln was resorting to the common, uninspiring methods of politicians seeking a congressional nomination, Douglas was moving to the Senate, and soon these great rivals were under the dome of the Capitol together.

THEY MET IN CONGRESS

Lincoln entered the House without prestige of any sort and left in two years without the enhancement of his reputation, and during these two years Douglas was sweeping forward, looming larger, and ever more imposing in the public eye.

Now, note this evidence of their relative positions. In those years two men were minutely keeping diaries in the Capital. John Quincy Adams loved to gossip with himself in the privacy of his journal and to record

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his opinions of public men with whom he worked. Time and again he found occasion to mention Douglas; not once did Lincoln's activities or personality impel him to record his name. At the same time President Polk was daily writing in his diary of events and people at the Capitol and White House, and scores of Members of both Houses figure in his pages. Douglas is mentioned times without number; and there is not a line in the "Diary of Polk" to indicate that he knew of the existence of Abraham Lincoln.

And how different their lives in Washington! While Douglas was moving in the gay circles of a brilliant society, Lincoln was amusing himself in a bowling alley; while Douglas was busy with conferences and on the floor, Lincoln was delighting his colleagues with characteristic stories in the cloak rooms; while Douglas was a leader of the leaders, Lincoln remained one of the most inconsequential and unimpressive of the rank and file.

This then is one of the mysteries of Lincoln—9 years before the great debates, 11 years before the presidential struggle in 1860, no human prescience could have foreseen the possibility of the reversal of their positions.

INCUBATION OF THE GREAT LINCOLN

Manifestly the five years between Lincoln's retirement to private life and his return to politics were the most fruitful and yet mysterious in his career. No one understood better than he that he had failed to measure up to his opportunities. It is impossible to believe that he did not make disheartening comparisons of himself with Douglas, with whom he started out. To one of his ambition, and I reject the bizarre theory that he had it not, this must have been gall and wormwood. In the quiet five years that followed he underwent a metamorphosis intellectually and spiritually. He had the time to take a sober inventory of his equipment; to weigh the comparative worthlessness of his achievements; to measure the things for which he had striven against the realities; to meditate for the first time selflessly upon the conditions and the movements of the times. He came to know himself in the long rides on the circuit, in the lonely vigils of the country taverns, and in the silences and the solitudes, far from the cheering multitudes that beset and confused Douglas, he found the time to turn his philosophy into a formula and to strip the outstanding problems of the hour of their legalistic wrappings and reduce them to simple moral terms.

Thus when the Kansas-Nebraska act called him again to face his old antagonist it was a new Lincoln that appeared—a deeper, sadder, stronger, simpler, humbler, firmer Lincoln, convinced of the elemental truth of his position. Henceforth until the last phase, while Douglas was dealing with who we now know were phantoms and fighting shadows, Lincoln, with inspired vision, was struggling for the eternal verities on which depend the cause of humanity and the ultimate preservation of democracy.

THE ORATORS

A comparison of Lincoln and Douglas without a reference to their oratory would be the omission of an essential; for Lincoln was perhaps the only one of the Presidents who owed his elevation to his eloquence; and Douglas won his position by his extraordinary mastery in argument and speech.

Douglas was more debater than orator; for oratory at its best implies imagination, emotion, a sense of poetry, and a capacity for spiritual exaltation, in all of which he was deficient. But in the field of parliamentary debate he carried forward the noblest traditions of the art, and ranks with the younger Pitt. If he fell short of Charles James Fox, it was because he lacked the latter's imagination and sympathy, which frequently interspersed his arguments with the purple patches of the finest eloquence. But he resembled Fox in the molten rush of his fervent argument. To him debate was a battle, and he sought to take the enemy by storm. He marshaled his facts as a master disciplinarian marshals his battalions. When the problem was simple, and he was munitioned with the facts, there was everything that was irresistible in the devastating sweep of his logic; when the field before him was studded with pitfalls of adverse truths, no one could hurdle them or evade them with more felicity and plausibility.

It was his fluency, his familiarity with his subject, and his ardent manner that set him apart from the political orators of his day. His enemies resented the impression he invariably conveyed of absolute honesty, and I, for one, am thoroughly convinced that he could always reconcile his course with his conscience.

And yet his was a mind that moved in the grooves of convention—a legalistic mind that knew no higher law than that which is written in the statutes; he made no appeal to the heart; he spoke to the mind alone.

Thus while there are many to whom he might be compared, there is no one with whom to compare Lincoln—among the moderns he made a style. He had one advantage over Douglas: His training was in dealing with the plain people of the farms, the villages, the workshops with whom plain speaking and the homely phrase are necessary. Among these he lived. He knew the way to their minds and, better still, to their hearts. He studied the psychology of the mass mind in the familiar conversations of the country store; he mastered simplicity of expression through necessity; he learned the virtue of the homely

illustration and the humorous touch; he knew what the academic scholar little suspects that in the heart of the most elemental there is that strain of poetry through which Christ wrought his revolution and entered into the heart of humanity.

Thus Douglas was the speaker of the Senate and Lincoln of the open spaces and the market places. One was the logician; the other was the orator. One was an advocate; the other was an artist.

And that to me is the most amazing thing of all. For Douglas, living from boyhood with men of education and scholastic training, lacked the literary impulse; and Lincoln, unschooled and for many years deprived of books, developed a passion for the precise word and phrase that made him the artist that Douglas never became.

This literary impulse of Lincoln was comparatively late in development. It was only after his return from his unfortunate experience in Congress that we find him in the throes of composition struggling for the precise word, the illuminating and the haunting phrase. This he mastered as no other American orator.

Thus his advantage over Douglas. The throbbing, pulsating multitude listening to the two were pleased according to their partialities or politics—each convinced that his favorite was the master. But the real test comes when the voice of the orator is still and his personal magnetism is withdrawn. Then one could remember only the general impression of the Douglas speech; but one carried away from Lincoln's some immortal phrase expressive of an eternal truth that goes singing through the generations in the hearts of men.

Posterity knows that Douglas spoke; it knows what Lincoln said.

AS POLITICIANS

Now, both were consummate politicians, else neither would have had the chance to demonstrate capacity as statesmen, and here they differed too. The measure of a politician is his capacity to anticipate and mold and lead public opinion, as well as to organize and direct the movements of men. Lincoln and Douglas resembled in their common possession of intuition. This in politics is the quality that stands for genius. Both possessed the trait which for want of a more graceful word may be called cunning. They knew how to play force against force, prejudice against prejudice, interest against interest, and to set machinery in motion without appearing on the scene.

Both understood the virtue of organization; both assiduously cultivated the leaders down to the trenches, and both under cover made cunning use of the press in the creation of sentiment.

But they had their differences and these are important.

Douglas was dictatorial; Lincoln persuasive.

Douglas was arrogantly commanding; Lincoln was gently conciliatory. Douglas moved among his worshippers of the rank and file with the haughtiness of a conqueror; Lincoln mingled with the common workers with the familiarity of a comrade.

Douglas issued ukases with the rattling of the sword; Lincoln, like Jefferson, insinuated suggestions with a smile.

Douglas's domineering nature impelled him to plunge impetuously into needless danger; Lincoln moved more cautiously and with greater circumspection. What Essex was to Burleigh, Douglas was to Lincoln.

Sagacious as both men were as politicians, it is a strange coincidence that each in the supreme crises of his career encountered opposition and embarrassment from his own party.¹ In the senatorial contest of 1853 Douglas was forced to fight not only the natural enemy but the concentrated power and prejudice of a Democratic administration; and Lincoln in the Presidency was constantly harassed by the congressional leaders of his own party. A Democratic Senator had to fight a Democratic President, and a Republican President had to submit to the heckling of a Republican Congress. And now with the passing of the passions of those days of struggle, the Muse of History has given its approval to Senator Douglas and to President Lincoln.

THEIR FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

It is possible to show that on the fundamentals of government Lincoln and Douglas were not remote. Both avowedly were disciples of Jefferson. One as well as the other subscribed to the Jeffersonian theory of State sovereignty. Douglas preached it aggressively all through life; Lincoln less frequently, and yet he was elected in 1860 on a platform pledged to the preservation of the rights of the States.

Both consistently declared adherence to the Jeffersonian doctrine of the rule of the people, and the most unpopular acts of Douglas's life were based upon that theory. And yet Douglas was less the professing disciple of the sage of Monticello than Lincoln, who quoted him frequently and declared that "the principles of Jefferson are the definitions and the axioms of a free society."

But when a Jeffersonian principle of government for the people was involved in Jackson's Homeric battle against privilege and the rule of money in the fight on the national bank, we find Lincoln fighting with the Whigs on the side of Biddle and privilege. The first time these remarkable rivals met in joint debate was in this city, one in defense and the other in denunciation of Jackson's destruction of the bank. And yet scornful as Lincoln seemed of Jackson in those days when in the most solemn moment of his career he retired to a room for the prepara-

tion of his inaugural address he took with him a copy of the Constitution and Jackson's nullification proclamation, and nothing more.

Douglas was a militant Jacksonian from the beginning of his career. Lincoln became a Jacksonian in the crisis of his life. It was the Jacksonian spirit that moved Douglas in his battles to keep down the spirit of disunion; it was with Jacksonian weapons that Lincoln sternly put it down when it reared its head.

If we find inconsistencies in the lives of both, it must be borne in mind that both were party men, and on the minor issues that come and go were loyal to the party program, but on the elementals they were very close. They both believed in government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and where either deviated from the principle in practice it was a concession to party harmony or to meet the political exigencies of the moment. In all vital things they were robust champions of the distinctively American conception of the proper relations of the people to the State.

ON ABOLITIONISM

In the last days of their rivalry these gladiators crossed swords on slavery—and yet, even here, they had their contacts. They were agreed that the institution of slavery was protected by the Constitution; that under the constitutional guaranty the owners of slaves were entitled to protection in their property; and that the fugitive slave law was in accord with the fundamental law of the land.

There is nothing of record to show that Lincoln, any more than Douglas, approved of the provocative methods of the extreme abolitionists, their contempt for the Constitution, or their indifference to the Union. If he did not indulge in public criticism, he was in private life and need not speak; but Douglas, fighting against all extremes that were driving the Nation toward disunion, was forced to speak. His hatred of the abolitionist was the hatred of the law-abiding man for what he conceived to be lawlessness; of the practical realist for what he thought to be a destructive idealism; of a lover of the Union for what he knew to be a force making for the destruction of the Union. He attacked them openly, vigorously, repeatedly, contemptuously in the Senate and on the platform; and they hung him in effigy in Boston and hooted him in the streets of Chicago. Neither Lincoln nor Douglas expressed sympathy with Lovejoy or John Brown. That is the reason Sumner stained his scholastic lips with vulgar epithets hurled at Douglas, and the reason Wendell Phillips called Lincoln "that slave bound from Illinois."

And there was a personal reason why neither could sympathize with the extreme abolitionist view of slavery and slave owners. The father-in-law of each owned slaves; the wives of both had black mammyies in their childhood; and neither was a stranger to households overrun by slaves. Douglas, familiar with plantations, had seen no Simon Legree, and Lincoln never forgot the patriarchal atmosphere of the Speed home in Kentucky. They each knew that good men and women lived in the land of slavery, and both were repelled by the unmeasured denunciation of the people of the South.

ON SLAVERY

With the passing of time, a tradition has grown up that Lincoln in his early years swore an eternal war on slavery; but it was 20 years after he saw the slave auction episode in New Orleans before he deeply concerned himself with the problem. Until the last phase was reached the difference between Lincoln and Douglas on the morals of slavery was this—Lincoln had declared slavery unjust; and if Douglas believed slavery wrong he never gave utterance to the thought.

Now, it does not follow from Douglas's silence on the morals of slavery that he thought it right. There may have been other reasons for his silence. As a youth in Congress he had read the dire possibilities of slavery agitation by the red flare of the burning abolition pamphlets taken from the mails. He knew that agitation aimed at the greatest property interest in the South threatened the perpetuity of the Union—and he was as passionately devoted to the Union as Jackson when the nullification reared its head. For that he would have put down the agitation, right or wrong, since he could see no solution through Federal action. One who paid tribute to his memory when he died has given in a sentence one sufficient reason for his silence on the morals of the institution—"he never criticized a wrong for which he did not provide a remedy"—and he saw no remedy.

Thus for years Douglas, in close contact with the Southern extremists in the cloak rooms of the Capitol, knew better than even Lincoln could have known in Springfield, the desperate danger to the Union—and he concentrated on its preservation, with slavery or without. Thus the mistakes he made; the compromises for which, like Webster, he has been damned—he loved the Union more than he hated slavery.

And so, too, in the end, when men were fighting and falling on bloody fields, Lincoln assumed a position not dissimilar when he said that if he could save the Union by freeing part of the slaves, he would; if by freeing all the slaves, he would; if by freeing none of the slaves, he would—but he would save the Union.

Thus the paths of these two majestic rivals led at length to this common Jacksonian ground—"the Union—it must be preserved."

DOUGLAS RECRUITING FOR LINCOLN

It were superfluous to dwell on the great debates—these have been described and characterized through 70 years. Never in human history a more epochal contest involving two men of greater genius, honesty, or courage.

Nor can aught now be gleaned from reviewing the story of the campaign of 1860 when they contested for the Presidency. With the sectional division of the Democracy, the inevitability of Lincoln's triumph was soon foreseen. Here at Springfield Lincoln awaited the result in silence, resting his case on the arguments of the great debates.

But there was no rest for Douglas; and so for weeks he feverishly swept over the country, looming larger than Lincoln, for the moment, in the drama of those tragic times. Permit me to suggest that it was with the realization of his defeat that Douglas rose to his greatest stature as a patriot. If he was lost, the Union might still be saved. The candidate was merged in the patriot, the politician in the statesman, and soon the Nation fairly rocked with his burning denunciation of the extremists on both sides. Sweeping into the South he served notice that the election of Lincoln would not justify secession, and that the Union, cemented by the blood of all sections, would be maintained, if need be by the force of arms.

The first and greatest recruiting officer that Lincoln had was Douglas in the last days of that campaign.

AFTER THE ELECTION

And now the election is over; the simple man at Springfield has risen on his misfortunes to the supreme height of power; the brilliant, dashing rival of the Senate has been cast down by fate. All over the South the rumblings of preparation for resistance are heard. And with Lincoln, more than helpless now to speak the word or do the act to stay the movement, we see Douglas hastening to the Senate to do what he, better than any other public man, could do. He sought to do what Clay with his aid had done before—to hold the States together yet awhile and calm the storm. He tried to shame and crush the extremists on both sides—there was no other way. Did he criticize Lincoln and his party? Give him credit for the strategy and psychology of the act—he was seeking to stay the hands of men who honestly believed that Lincoln's election meant the solidification of the North against the South.

And he failed—the day of compromise was over.

DOUGLAS JOINS LINCOLN

And with the realization of the fact Douglas put all partisanship aside and moved in the full panoply of his power to the side of Lincoln to sustain him in the fight for the preservation of the Union of the States. On the eve of the inauguration we see Douglas pleading with Lincoln for his consent to a constitutional amendment to remove the slavery question from the field of congressional debate and hear Lincoln give consent.

And then the day of the great defiance of the forces of disunion—the scene on the east portico of the Capitol, when Lincoln took the oath with Douglas sitting by his side to hold his hat. I challenge you to search the records of the great rivalries of all time and find me a more thrilling picture for a canvas.

It was not Douglas alone who stood there that historic hour at Lincoln's side—there, too, were the more than a million and a quarter men who voted for Douglas in the nonseceding States whom he represented there that day.

And now, one other picture, more inspiring still. It was on the day that sent a cold chill to the hearts of the people when secession unlimbered its guns and fired on Sumpter. It meant war. It was war. The hour for argument and persuasion was now past. The challenge to the Union has been made. The day has passed and night has come, and there are lights in the windows of the White House, and a carriage stops near midnight at the portico, and a man alights, and a moment later Stephen A. Douglas has reported to Abraham Lincoln for duty! The rivalries of the years have dropped away; the political differences are forgotten; and among all the millions in the land these two men, whose unity of purpose was most essential to the salvation of the State, sat down together at a table with a map to plan a campaign of defense. And when, that night, the word flashed over the wires to the four corners that Douglas had been with Lincoln and had pledged himself "to fully sustain the President in all his constitutional functions, to preserve the Union, and maintain the Government," a million Douglas followers saluted the President and prepared to march.

More epochal than the conference of the Roman triumvirate to divide the world at the fall of Caesar was this midnight conference of Lincoln and Douglas to save a nation from disunion—and more inspiring.

And now the call goes forth for volunteers, and now Douglas, worn and sick, is rallying the friends of the Union to the standard here, there, and everywhere, and now the footbeats of many marching men and the flying of the flag and the sound of the fife and drum.

And then, too soon, one summer's day, crowds throng the street before the hotel in Chicago where Douglas lay dying. The death of Douglas was one of the greatest casualties of the war. He fell on no

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bloody field, but none the less his was an immolation on the altar of his country. And though his spirit passed, it lingered yet a while a determining factor in the policies of men and it flashed in the swords of the McClellans as they turned to the battle fields; and it hovered, too, about the lonely man whom Douglas crossed so many times in life—hovered about him when so many of the living stayed away.

What a rivalry! What a union! These choice spirits who met in early life in opposition, and through the many years went their divergent ways, had met at last with a common purpose, a common passion, a common patriotism, on the top of the hill besides the guns where fluttered the flag of the Union to the preservation of which they both gave up their lives.

Had Lincoln and Douglas died on the same day in the first year of the war, the historical status of the martyr would not have been much

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more impressive than that of his lifelong rival. The Lincoln of history and of immortality was developed or brought out by the sufferings and struggles of four blood-soaked, tear-drenched years of ineffable loneliness and anxiety. As he passed through the flames all that was ordinary or small in Lincoln was consumed and all that was fine and noble was left, and thus he stands on the pedestal of eternity a figure of pure gold. His patience, his prescience, his unerring sense of justice, his generosity and genius, his tenderness and magnanimity made for soldiers in the field and their families awaiting their return a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. The politicians scorned him to the end of his life, and the plain people will love him to the end of time.

These two marvelous men who fought each other throughout their lives will live in a companionship of glory, vivid and imposing, through all the countless generations yet to be.